

SouthingtonNews

Simmons wants spies, armor

By NICK ANTHONY
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SOUTHINGTON — U.S. Rep. Rob Simmons, R-2nd District, said the United States needs to increase funding for the war on terror and change the way that it is being fought at a Rotary Club meeting Wednesday.

According to Simmons, America needs to improve its human intelligence and upgrade its armored military vehicles.

Simmons said that while American intelligence is incredible at intercepting communication via technical systems, such as cell phones or satellites, it relies too heavily upon these means.

"Human intelligence is what we are weak on," Simmons said. "They (terrorist groups) don't communicate by cell phones; in Somalia they used drums, and nobody knew how to read them."

Simmons said terrorist groups are highly trained, and to solve this, our country needs more spies. However, spies are not professionals that can be trained overnight.

"To get a person who knows the language, becomes familiar with the area and can be discreet takes five to 10 years," Simmons said.

Simmons was a spy for the U.S. himself after he served for 20 months in Vietnam. He could not say where but added that he is fluent in Vietnamese and Chinese. He also said that he spent five years in the Far East collecting information for America.

Simmons also decried the fate of American troops in Iraq, who are doing their jobs without armored Humvees. According to the congressman, when Humvees are made and used in America they don't need added armor. However, the ones shipped to Iraq do, he said.

"They didn't need the up-armor in the first place because the vehicles were behind the lines. Now we're putting them in the front of the lines," and in order to protect troops, the vehicles need to have the up-armor, Simmons said.

The up-armor is a 1,000-pound layer of protection against non-governmental organizations like terrorist groups that use roadside bombs, grenades and large-caliber bullets. The armor provides a canopy over the Humvee's passenger compartment, with plates forming heavy doors

and steel securing the floor.

Humvees, or high mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicles, were introduced in the mid-1980s to transport troops and equipment in rugged terrain. The vehicle, with armor, costs about \$150,000.

Simmons said that out of the 11,000 Humvees in Iraq only 2,000 have the up-armor. He added it would cost \$72,000 per vehicle to get the proper armor on and protect troops. The upgrade would cost \$648 million, using the Congressman's figures.

Why all the changes?

According to Simmons, the war on terror did not begin on Sept. 11, 2001. It began with the Iran Hostage Crisis in 1979, when Iranian militants stormed the United States Embassy in Tehran and took 52 Americans hostage. The hostages were held for 444 days.

Simmons also said that in 1983, a suicide car-bomber blew up the U.S. Embassy in Beirut, killing 17 Americans.

With these events, the war on terror began. But Simmons said the United States failed to respond until it came home on Sept. 11, 2001.

"There was a change in attitude to address the problem of terror," Simmons said. "To formulate a plan that doesn't wait for the next attack."

But aside from the addition of spies and armor to vehicles, Simmons said, a way to ending terrorism is to leave politics at home.

"As Americans we should honor the desire for equality," Simmons said. "We have to better develop a system of communication (internationally) so we can all live our own lives with our own values without killing each other."

Rotary club member Walter Hushak said he invited the congressman to speak at their meeting because he is concerned about America forgetting about the war on terrorism.

"There is one and its serious," Hushak said.

Hushak said he and Simmons are both members of the Reserve Officers Association, a collection of veterans that served as officers. Simmons spent 19 months in Vietnam, where he earned two Bronze Star medals. He has also worked for the Central Intelligence Agency.

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